UNITED
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Economic and Social
Council

ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION REGARDING THE COORDINATION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Note by the secretariat

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1. In line with decision 1997/286 of the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) is to consider, at its fourth session under agenda item 8, the question of the role and activities of the CSTD regarding the coordination of science and technology for development.

2. Since its establishment in 1992, the CSTD has paid particular and continuous attention to the issue of coordination of the activities of the United Nations system in the area of science and technology for development. At its third session, the CSTD reviewed both its own sessional deliberations at the first and second sessions and its inter-sessional activities entailing coordination and co-operation, on the basis of a note prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat (E/CN.16/1997/2). In the course of that review, the CSTD noted that the mandate for the coordination of the activities of the United Nations bodies in the area of science and technology was the responsibility of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (now the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)). In addition, the functions of the former Joint Inter-Agency Task Force on Science and Technology for Development had been assumed by the existing coordinating bodies under the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The Consultative Committee on Programme and Operations, Questions and the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development were the two bodies that dealt with issues related to inter-agency coordination in the field of science and technology for development. In this context, the coordinating role of the CSTD mainly consisted of promoting complementary activities, avoiding duplication and liaising with the relevant United Nations organs and agencies as well as other multilateral organizations in carrying out its substantive work during the inter-sessional period.

3. The subject of coordination was also taken up by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session in July 1998. In its resolution 1998/46, which reconstituted the CSTD, the Council called for the CSTD to establish effective coordination with all other functional commissions, the Economic and Social Council and, in particular, the Commission on Sustainable Development and UNCTAD. The CSTD should also improve and make more effective its coordination with other relevant United Nations bodies, including regional commissions. The recommendations of the Council echoed the decisions taken by the CSTD at its third session, according to which: (a) the secretariat of the CSTD shall be requested to study the possibility of setting up, in collaboration with other United Nations bodies, including regional commissions, an electronic network of their activities in science and technology for development, making the network widely accessible to science and technology institutes around the world; and (b) in order to promote better interaction with United Nations bodies, especially regional commissions, the CSTD shall give consideration to including suitably qualified members of those bodies in its working groups. In addition, meetings of the working groups of the CSTD are to be held in the offices of the regional commissions wherever possible. This note describes the progress made in responding to those decisions.

Building an electronic network

4. The possibility of setting up an electronic network was to be investigated at an inter-agency meeting to discuss technical assistance within the United Nations system in the area of information and communication technology. As it has not been possible to hold this meeting, owing to the lack of resources, the UNCTAD secretariat has taken steps to establish electronic linkages as part of its own dissemination activities.

5. The secretariat has set up a website for all UNCTAD activities, a separate segment of which has been devoted to the CSTD. The website provides information on the membership, mandates, method of work, upcoming meetings and other events of the CSTD, and lists relevant documents with abstracts or executive summaries. In order to enhance the dissemination of system-wide information on science and technology, the secretariat has included links to the websites of other United Nations bodies carrying out activities related to science and technology and has requested them to reciprocate by including a link to the CSTD in their sites.

6. In parallel, the secretariat has been studying the possibility of setting up an interactive information system on technology policy issues and policy-related activities within the United Nations. At its July 1997 meeting, the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (EC-ESA) designated UNCTAD as the focal point for a sub-group on technology policy issues and policy-oriented activities of entities that are members of EC-ESA. The purpose of the sub-group is to foster cooperation among its members in the area of technology policy. The secretariat suggested that such cooperation could be best achieved through the creation of a system for information exchange and prepared a set of three options for the type of information system that might be established. The EC-ESA, at its eighth meeting in January 1998, chose the option whereby a system would be constructed at the website of a single EC-ESA member, designed in such a way as to permit individual EC-ESA members to maintain their own inputs on the basis of a unified and coordinated architecture and following the same principles of presentation. The Inter-Agency Meeting and Documentation Information System (IAMIS) is the probable location of the main database, and EC-ESA proposed that UNCTAD should undertake discussions with the information systems task force in 1998 on the modalities of setting up the system. The outcome of those discussions, including recommendations for further work, is included in a joint UNCTAD-EC report to be presented at the meeting of IAMIS in 24 March 1999. The CSTD might wish to be informed by the secretariat of the recommendations of EC-ESA, which will be available at the time of the fourth session.

Inter-sessional activities entailing coordination and cooperation

7. The recommendations by the Economic and Social Council were fully taken into consideration by the CSTD in carrying out its inter-sessional activities. Thus, the third meeting of the working group on a common vision, the workshop on the future of science and technology for development and the workshop on the coalition of executives were held in the offices of ECA in Addis Ababa. The ECA secretariat provided logistical support at the meetings and qualified ECA staff members also participated in the meetings.

8. Similarly, the Chairman of the CSTD invited the various United Nations bodies to participate in the working groups on the main and secondary

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The members of EC-ESA are: DESA, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), UNCTAD, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, the United Nations Office at Vienna, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and the United Nations University.

themes. A number of organizations responded positively, appointing focal points to follow the work of the CSTD. In some cases, their representatives participated in the working groups, and made substantive contributions. The Working Group on Science and Technology Partnerships and Networking for National Capacity-Building benefited from substantive inputs provided by representatives from different United Nations departments, regional commissions and agencies such as UNDP, the United Nations University Institute for New Technologies, ESCWA, and the World Health Organization; the Panel on Biotechnology benefited from the participation of the World Bank and UNCTAD's Division on International Trade in Goods and Services and Commodities. The costs of these contributions, in terms of human resources and travel, were borne by the respective organizations.

9. The integrated review on investment policy and on science, technology and innovation policy in Ethiopia benefited from substantive input from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, which made available an expert to carry out a review of policies for capacity-building in the leather sector.

10. At the same time, the secretariat has been diffusing its own work on science, technology and innovation policy reviews by attending various intergovernmental meetings such as the ESCWA Senior Expert Group meeting on Science and Technology Policies held in Beirut from 10 to 12 March 1999. At this meeting, the secretariat made a substantive contribution to the ongoing discussions on science and technology policies with a presentation of its work on the reviews.